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SUBJECT: PROVINCIAL POLITICS IN ATLANTIC CANADA: WHO'S IN TROUBLE AND WHO ISN'T

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11. SUMMARY: With spring legislative sessions due to start soon in Atlantic Canada, we have taken a political snapshot at each of the four provinces to see just where each of the four governments (all currently Tory blue) stand. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, with their minority governments, present the most interesting cases, especially since the respective premiers are weighting the merits of calling snap elections. As for Newfoundland-Labrador and Prince Edward Island, both provinces are in the solid grip of strong governments that undoubtedly will have no trouble living out their mandates. Another aspect to the current political situation in the region is the influence of the federal Tories and how new national policies might help or harm their provincial cousins. END SUMMARY

12. New Brunswick

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--Lt. Governor: Hermenegilde Chiasson (Appointed for a five year term on August 26, 2003)

--Premier: Bernard Lord - Progressive Conservatives Party of New Brunswick

--Most Recent Election: June 9, 2003

--Current party standings in the House: (55 seats in total)

Progressive Conservatives: 27 seats (Leader: Bernard Lord since 1997)

Liberals: 26 seats (Leader: Shawn Graham since 2002)

New Democratic Party: 0 seats (Leader: Allison Brewer since 2005 - does not have a seat of her own yet)

Independents: 2 seats

--Election history: Bernard Lord and his Conservative party have governed New Brunswick since they overturned the incumbent Liberals in the June 1999 election.

--Current Environment: Election-watchers in New Brunswick are divided in their predictions on the fate of Premier Lord and his governing Tory party. The party recently lost its one seat majority in the Legislature when a disgruntled backbencher left the party to sit as an independent after a spat with the Premier over a cabinet post. This defection has left the Tories in a precarious situation with just weeks to go before they need to get their annual budget passed in the Legislature. Without a majority in the Legislature, the Premier is in danger of having the Opposition Liberals defeat the budget, a move which would trigger a provincial general election. Accordingly, Premier Lord is left with having to decide on two scenarios: number one, try to convince the former Tory to support the budget which

would keep the government in power, or number two, table the budget and then call a snap election before the Legislature has a chance to vote on it.

Opinions are varied on which of these scenarios the Premier will chose, but in recent days, more cynical commentators are saying the issue could be settled by money, specifically, legislative pensions. It appears that 20 members of the House (including the ex-Tory) need only one more legislative session in order to qualify for their pensions. The dilemma for these members is that if they help prop up the Lord government so it makes it through the next session, they would get their pensions. However, if the government falls and there is an election they would only get the pension if they were re-elected - an iffy prospect for some of the members. With the budget vote scheduled for April 7, the Premier's decision will not be long coming.

13. Nova Scotia

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--Lt. Governor: Myra Freeman (Appointed for a five-year term in May 2000 which has been extended until a new LG is chosen.)

--Premier: Rodney MacDonald - Progressive Conservative

--Most Recent Election: August 5, 2003

--Current Party Standings in the House: (52 seats in total)

Progressive Conservatives: 25 (Leader: Rodney MacDonald since Feb 11, 2006)

New Democratic Party: 15 (Leader: Darrell Dexter since June 4, 2001)

Liberal Party: 10 (Leader: Francis MacKenzie since Oct 23, 2004 - does not have a seat of his own yet)

Independent: 1

Vacant: 1

--Election History: The Progressive Conservatives have been

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governing Nova Scotia since July 1999 when they defeated the incumbent Liberal government by a wide majority.

--Current Environment: Nova Scotians appear to be quite happy with their newly minted Premier, 34-year old Rodney MacDonald, who took over from the now-retired former Premier John Hamm in February. Despite the change in leadership, the face of the new government is unlikely to change significantly. Premier MacDonald has kept most of the Hamm cabinet members and has done nothing as yet to shake the fragile coalition with the Opposition parties that has kept his minority government in power. However, a recent public opinion poll shows the new MacDonald government with significant support over the opposition, a fact which may tempt the new Premier to call a snap election in an attempt to get his own mandate. As with the situation in New Brunswick, the answer to the question of whether Nova Scotians will be going to the polls should be known before too long as the spring session of the legislature is due to start shortly.

14. Newfoundland and Labrador

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--Lt. Governor: Edward M. Roberts (Appointed for a five year term on November 1, 2002)

--Premier: Danny Williams (Party: Progressive Conservative)

--Most recent election: October 21, 2003

--Current Party Standings in the House (48 seats in total)

Conservatives 35 (Leader: Danny Williams since April 7, 2001)

Liberals: 11 (Leader: Jim Bennett since February 6, 2006.

Has no seat.)

New Democratic Party: 2 (Leader: Jack Harris since November, 1992; retiring in May 2006)

--Election History: With their win in the October 2003 provincial election, Premier Williams and his Tories upset a 12-year old Liberal government.

--Current Environment: Premier Williams and his Progressive Conservative party are enjoying a very comfortable majority. With an approval rating of approximately 70 percent, the Tories have a solid grip on the province leaving the Opposition liberals and NDP floundering. For the most part, the Premier, with a reputation as a staunch fighter for his province, is the principal reason behind this support. In particular Williams' recent defense of Canada's annual seal hunt in the face of harsh criticism by rock superstar Paul McCartney even swayed over some of the Premier's harshest critics. However, it is Williams' tough resource policy which consistently garners him the most favor. The Premier has been unwavering in his threat that Newfoundland-Labrador's significant petroleum and hydro electricity resources will go undeveloped unless the province gets better royalty deals than those for existing energy projects. Expect smooth sailing for the Williams government with no clouds on the horizon as yet.

15. Prince Edward Island

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--Lt. Governor: J. Leonce Bernard (Appointed for a five year term on May 28, 2001)

--Premier: Patrick Binns (Party: Progressive Conservatives)

--Most Recent Election: September 29, 2003

--Current Party Standings in the House (27 seats in total)

Conservatives: 23 (Leader: Patrick Binns since May 4, 1996)

Liberals: 4 (Leader: Robert Ghiz since April 5, 2003)

New Democratic Party: 0 (Leadership convention April 22, 2006)

--Election History: Pat Binns and the Progressive Conservatives have been governing Prince Edward Island since 1996 when they overturned a 10-year incumbent Liberal government.

--Current Environment: Premier Binns and his ruling Conservative party have a solid hold on the Island electorate, consistently earning high scores in public opinion polls. This situation has made it difficult for the Opposition Liberals to make any inroads and they continue to suffer from only a token representation in the Legislature. Just this week, the Liberals were further demoralized by their loss in a provincial by-election which, had they won, would have given them a much

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needed new seat and a significant psychological boost.

16. COMMENT: An interesting sidebar to this snapshot is the influence of the new Harper government in Ottawa. As one political commentator remarked recently the issue here is money - money for health care, money for childcare, money for tax cuts and rebates and the list goes on. At the moment, Atlantic Canadians are looking for some action from Ottawa on these issues and the regional pollsters point out that the voters' perception is that they are more likely to see results if the federal government and the four provincial governments are all of the same political stripe. Whether that federal influence continues to have a positive impact or not remains to be seen, but at least for now, the voters are hopeful that their respective governments can and will work with Ottawa to come up with some new solutions to some old problems. END COMMENT
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